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SUBJECT: Uzbeks Skeptical on Afghanistan but Back Their Man in the North

REF: a) KABUL 11

CLASSIFIED BY: Nicholas Berliner, Pol-Econ Chief; REASON: 1.4(B), (D)

11. (C) Summary: In a meeting with Ambassador, Uzbek Deputy Foreign Minister for Asia Anvar Salikhbaev commented on the situation in Afghanistan, including the future of Gen. Dostum. The Uzbeks acknowledge his flaws but still support Dostum. They continue to fault Karzai for Afghanistan's problems. Salikhbaev expressed concern that greater numbers of U.S. forces will not stabilize the situation and could, in fact, make it worse, particularly if this were to draw in "the million extremists waiting in Pakistan to join the fight." End Summary.

12. (C) Ambassador met on January 7 with Anvar Salikhbaev, Uzbekistan's Deputy Foreign Minister for Asia. (Note: In the Uzbek MFA this region includes India, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Salikhbaev also served as ambassador to Pakistan.) In a discussion on Afghanistan and the future of Gen. Dostum, Salikhbaev said that Uzbekistan does not see another figure of sufficient stature who could replace Dostum in the north. He said that other actors were playing games with Karzai and unfairly blaming Uzbekistan, but that the GOU "does not meddle in the internal affairs of Afghanistan." Of Dostum, Salikhbaev said, "he's not the problem; others are causing problems", even going so far as to suggest that people around Karzai had exploited and fueled Dostum's problems with alcohol in order to get rid of him. Salikhbaev was fairly dismissive of Sayed Noorullah, saying that he was not a figure who could command sufficient authority to replace Dostum as leader of Junbesh.

13. (C) Characteristically for Uzbek officials, Salikhbaev was dismissive of Karzai, describing him as a weak figure who has turned his back to the rampant corruption taking place within his inner circle. He cited Afghan Economy Minister Shams as a case in point, saying that Shams, who is currently in Tashkent for talks with the GOU, arrived late because he had been "partying" in Switzerland for New Year's. To add insult to injury, Shams had then tried to blame Uzbekistan for delays in energy talks between the two countries. Likewise, Salikhbaev accused Energy Minister Ismael Khan of trying to set Uzbekistan up for failure on issues involving delivery of electricity to northern Afghanistan.

14. (C) In a meeting also devoted to the issue of transit of supplies through Uzbekistan (septel), Salikhbaev offered his personal opinion that a build up of U.S. forces in Afghanistan could actually have a destabilizing effect. He cited civilian casualties and building popular resentment as the primary reasons for this and repeated the oft-heard GOU refrain that the situation in Afghanistan does not have a military solution. A fearful and resentful population, Salikhbaev maintained, will only increase support for the Taliban. Ambassador responded by saying that there was agreement that economic development and better governance were the sine qua non for success in Afghanistan, but that without the security provided by additional forces, it would be impossible to bring this about.

15. (C) Salikhbaev pointed to Pakistan as the root of problems in Afghanistan. He said that it would be impossible to solve Afghanistan without first bringing the situation in Pakistan under control. The GOU is alarmed by the situation there and has no confidence that Pakistan's current leadership has either the desire or the ability to rein in the border regions. Salikhbaev suggested that there are upwards of one million militants in Pakistan prepared to join the fight in Afghanistan. The Ambassador said the U.S. fully understood a regional solution is required, as Afghanistan's problems cannot be solved without help from its neighbors, and pointed out that U.S. strategy is increasingly taking this into account, but time will be needed for that strategy to take effect.

16. (C) Comment: Much of what Salikhbaev said was the standard GOU line on Afghanistan. The Uzbeks are convinced that Karzai should be replaced with a strongman, as if this would somehow create the functioning state that is the aim of our efforts in Afghanistan. The Uzbeks also consistently warn us that there is no military solution for Afghanistan. However, this was the first time we heard from any Uzbek official that they think increasing force levels in Afghanistan could actually have a negative effect on the situation there. Nevertheless, the Uzbeks want and need success in

TASHKENT 00000023 002 OF 002

Afghanistan, as the last thing they want to see is the return of a hostile, radical regime on their border.
NORLAND

To view the entire SMART message, go to URL http://repository.state.sgov.gov/_layouts/OSS_SearchResults.aspx?k=messageid:4e74ec4a-f021-4f28-8f